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Philippine Opposition May Boycott Parliamentary Elections

The major national opposition group in the Philippines--the Liberal Party--has announced its intention to boycott the 2 April parliamentary elections as a result of new election code procedures that allow bloc voting--a government scheme permitting the voter to cast his ballot for a straight pro-Marcos ticket.

Marcos will now have to decide whether to go ahead with the election campaign and face the almost certain likelihood that there will be little or no substantive opposition, or to consider dropping the bloc voting provision. If he goes ahead with the elections as scheduled, he runs the risk of worsening his human rights problem, as the race will then simply be a contest among government candidates for positions on the pro-Marcos slate.

The bloc voting provision was previously used in the fraudulent 1947 and 1949 national elections and subsequently abolished in 1951 after it provoked a public outcry. Opposition candidates have argued that without bloc voting, individual voters would have to peruse the entire list of candidates, and this would increase the chance that they would cast their ballot for well-known opposition figures such as former senators Aquino or Salonga.

Former senator Salonga has contended that Marcos' insistence on bloc voting reflects his concern that Liberal candidates would overwhelm the government slate in the metropolitan Manila area. The Philippine First Lady indeed argued successfully, during discussions on the draft election code, for two additional seats for the Manila area.

The national assembly will have 196 seats, consisting of 162 elected regional seats, 20 nonelected cabinet seats, and 14 seats representing progovernment interest groups such as youth, labor, and the farmers.

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President Marcos intends to field a progovernment slate of candidates called the New Society Movement. The Philippine leader has emphasized that this new grouping is not intended to replace his pre - martial law Nationalista Party, but will incorporate some liberals and members of civic organizations into a broader pro-Marcos electoral coalition. A campaign is already under way to draft Mrs. Marcos to head the new slate. She reportedly intends to seek her first elective office as a regional Manila delegate.

Marcos has access to all the levers of power and is fully aware that the opposition remains fragmented and lacks any organizational strength. Most of the disparate anti-Marcos elements would be reluctant to run individually if Salonga's Liberal slate pulls out of the parliamentary race.

The Philippine domestic political scene is complicated, and Marcos can be expected to take full advantage of his substantial political skill to continue to keep the opposition off balance. A more serious hurdle for Marcos will be whether he can portray the election outcome as representing a broad consensus regardless of the level of opposition participation.
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[Redacted]

Japan: Social Democratic League--Bastion for Disgruntled Socialists

Disaffected socialists who bolted from the Japan Socialist Party (JSP) last year formed a sixth opposition party--the Social Democratic League (SDL)--on 22 January. Hideo Den, the popular former director of the JSP's international affairs bureau, heads the new party. According to Den, the SDL favors close US-Japan relations, especially in the economic sphere, and supports the Mutual Security Treaty with the US.

The SDL is essentially a merger between a group of middle-of-the-road Dietmen who left the JSP during its September convention and the Socialist Citizens League, which was founded by the late Saburo Eda, former leader of the rightwing faction of the JSP, who bolted the party last spring. Both groups split with the JSP because of their opposition to the growing power and ideological militance of the Socialist Association (SA), the JSP's extreme leftwing Marxist faction. In essence the SA, which controls a sizable portion of the JSP's organizational machinery, advocates a coalition with the Communists and the conversion of the JSP into a class rather than a mass political party. In contrast, the moderate Socialists favor a more broadly based party and a Diet coalition excluding the Communists.

With the creation of the SDL, Den aspires to become a leader of the centrists and progressives. So far, however, with only six Diet seats, the SDL lacks funds and must build an organizational base to attract uncommitted voters. Den will also face stiff opposition to his efforts to assume leadership of the moderates from the established moderate parties, the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) and the Clean Government Party (CGP). Both the DSP and the CGP are now working toward a closer alliance to facilitate the formation of a coalition government with the ruling Liberal Democratic Party should it lose its Diet majority. The CGP leadership, for example, has been moving closer to the DSP's moderate policy line.

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The SDL cannot count on the backing of organized labor, especially Sohyo (General Council of Trade Unions), the financial base for the JSP. Although Den--a well known media personality--has not relied on labor unions for his electoral success, he and the SDL will have to tap such funding sources for their new party.

The SDL must compete as well with the JSP for votes and financial support. The JSP is currently attempting to reunite the party under the leadership of Chairman Ichio Asukata, the mayor of Yokohama. Asukata is calling for a moderation in the party line to appeal to a wider range of voters. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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Bangkok and the Shan: Accommodations in the Golden Triangle

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Prime Minister Kriangsak has taken pains to publicly reaffirm his predecessor's aggressive narcotics suppression policy. But contradictory Thai policies toward the Chinese and Burmese minority groups involved in trafficking across the Thai-Burmese border continue to strain Thai relations with Rangoon and to undercut efforts against drug traffickers in the Golden Triangle.

Kriangsak is emphasizing several approaches to the narcotics problem: crop substitution, which over time may provide an economically viable alternative to opium for the hill tribes in Thailand's northern provinces; beefing up Border Police Patrol (BPP) capabilities with more equipment and the development of special strike units; and improved relations with Burma, a precondition for more effective coordination against the traffickers along their common border. A crop substitution program has been under way for several years on an experimental basis and shows some promise of reducing domestic opium production. In the past two years, moreover, Thai police have had some notable successes in intercepting drug shipments and destroying refineries. Kriangsak's commitment should help to sustain and improve these efforts.

Nonetheless, whatever earnestness Kriangsak imparts to the Thai program, opium running out of Burma can be significantly reduced only through joint efforts by the Thai and Burmese. Deep-seated Burmese suspicions of the Thai have prevented sustained cooperation and remain a serious stumbling block despite Kriangsak's good personal relations with the Burmese leaders.

Rangoon is committed to narcotics suppression and has had modest success in cutting poppy production and interrupting trafficking out of northeast Burma into

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Thailand. Although insisting on running their own show without foreign advisers, the Burmese have [redacted]

[redacted] made effective use of US-supplied helicopters.

Tentative steps toward coordinated action with the Thai were nipped in the bud last June with the seizure of a Thai border police helicopter inside Burma. Burmese suspicions that the incursion was a manifestation of longstanding contacts by local Thai officials with traffickers were strengthened by the tardiness of a Thai apology for the incursion.

Burma is not yet ready to consider resuming joint action, an attitude underlined in recent comments by President Ne Win to advisers seeking policy guidelines for planning operations against narcotics installations near the Thai-Burmese border. In rejecting Thai overtures for discussions on common border problems, the Burmese President said that although he had a high personal regard for Thai Prime Minister Kriangsak, he was not confident of Kriangsak's intent or ability to translate his expressions of goodwill toward Burma into deeds. Specifically, Ne Win mentioned his annoyance over Thai refuge and assistance to Burmese political exiles and the impunity with which leading Shan traffickers operate in northern Thailand. He was not optimistic that the Thai would change their ways soon.

Ne Win's pessimism is well founded. The Thai Government has maintained for years that the presence of well-armed groups of Chinese Nationalist soldiers (known as Chinese Irregular Forces--CIF) and Burmese exiles in the northwest create a cheap defense buffer that would severely tax Thai military resources to supplant. In fact, this is a questionable rationale. The Burmese Communists pose no current threat to Thailand, and their area of operations is some distance from the Thai border. The CIF presence may discourage Thai Communist insurgent activity in the area. Despite the multitude of free-booting armed groups and the thin veneer of government authority in the area, it is remarkably free of security problems for Bangkok--in marked contrast to the south, where Communists, separatists, and bandits have created a generally chaotic situation.

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The difficulties involved in expelling these foreign "warlords" and the mutually lucrative arrangements they have developed with Thai officialdom over the years are undoubtedly closer to the root of the problem. The CIF have been in Thailand for some 25 years--their leaders, Generals Li and Tuan reportedly are now Thai citizens--and they are probably a permanent feature of the landscape. The Shan are in a more tenuous position, but they are not likely to be forced out so long as there is an active Communist insurgency across the border and so long as the Burmese Government has poor relations with its minority groups.

General

[redacted] Li's CIF Third Army; the Shan United Revolutionary Army (SURA), which operates under Li's patronage; and the Shan United Army (SUA), one of the more notorious drug-running organizations in the Golden Triangle, have recently been supplied with arms and other military equipment by the Thai military. Some of the equipment was directly provided by the Republic of China, which apparently is maintaining its links to the CIF. In exchange for these supplies, the Shan and Chinese irregulars protect road construction crews in Chiang Rai and Tak Provinces from harassment by Thai Communist insurgents. Thai Army leaders also claim to be worried about the apparent shift of Burmese Communist forces closer to the Thai border and are anxious to beef up the SURA as a buffer force.

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Although these arrangements with the Shan and CIF may conceivably serve Thailand's security interests, they clearly undercut the government's program to block narcotics traffic through the area. The SURA as well as the SUA are engaged in trafficking; using them as ad hoc security forces not only enhances their armed strength but provides them some cover for their smuggling activities along the border. Air Marshall Sitthi, Secretary General of the Thai National Security Council, is particularly worried that the SURA will use their newly acquired police radios to monitor the movements of Thai border police units looking for drug caravans and refineries, and he has protested the further transfer of arms and equipment.

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Sitthi's protests will probably have little effect. The transfer of equipment to the SURA was specifically approved by army commander General Soem, reportedly with Prime Minister Kriangsak's authorization, although Kriangsak has since denied approving or even knowing of the arrangement beforehand. Kriangsak has also denied other reports that SUA leader Chang Chi-fu travels freely in Thailand on Kriangsak's written authorization and that he promised to provide the SUA with equipment to assemble ammunition.

Kriangsak appears to be a man caught in the middle. On the one hand, he obviously values close relations with the US and is sensitive to the impact of Thailand's co-operation in suppressing the narcotics trade. But he undoubtedly feels pressure from the military who argue the advantages of a surrogate security force in the northwest--and probably benefit financially from the existing arrangements--and from his own long-established associations with the Shan and CIF.

There have been indications that Kriangsak is attempting to put some distance between himself and the Shan, however, and his recent protestations that he has not met or communicated with SUA leader Chang Chi-fu for many months is probably true. Kriangsak may even succeed in persuading the Army to be more judicious in its future arrangements with the Shan and to look elsewhere for ad hoc security forces. But the accommodations between Shan and Chinese smugglers and local Thai officials are so entrenched that they will inevitably continue despite formal policy decisions made in Bangkok. (SECRET NOFORN-NOCONTRACT-ORCON)

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South Korea: Developments Related to Human Rights

US PL-480 Assistance

The South Korean Government has strongly objected to wording proposed by the US for this year's bilateral PL-480 assistance agreement and maintains that it would label South Korea as a serious violator of human rights. South Korean Deputy Prime Minister Nam Tok-u has reportedly said that Seoul will not sign the proposed agreement; he has instructed his aides to inquire about the availability of comparable agricultural products in Canada or Australia. Both these countries offered to sell such products to South Korea at attractive prices in an effort to make inroads into the substantial South Korean agricultural import market.

The language that Seoul objects to does not refer specifically to violations of human rights, although it does specify that the assistance must contribute to meeting basic human needs. The South Koreans claim that the proposed wording compels them officially to acknowledge human rights violations they publicly deny. The South Koreans obviously hope that PL-480 aid can continue, but the country's economic growth has evidently brought Seoul to the point where it can consider other options.

Political Prisoners

South Korea is continuing to work on arrangements for freeing additional political prisoners early this year, [redacted]

[redacted] reportedly believes that the releases would be tactically wise at this time. Since most of the prisoners in question were jailed for less politically sensitive acts than the issuance of the so-called Myongdong Declaration, the late 1977 release of all but one of the Myongdong detainees opened the door to the release of other political prisoners. The cases of some of the

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accused are complicated by the fact that they are also charged with violation of the anti-Communist law; these persons are unlikely to be freed in the near future.

The government's more lenient attitude toward dissident activity was reflected in its tolerance of a 16 January prayer meeting held by the released Myongdong prisoners. Although the protest statements issued by the former detainees following the meeting were at least as strong as the Myongdong Declaration that had led to their imprisonment, none of the participants were arrested.
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